

ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE SUPERIOR COURT HOUSING SESSION

(formerly the Citizens Advisory Council for Housing Matters)

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S.B. 95 – Housing Court Advisory Board

GAE public hearing -- February 19, 2014
Testimony of Raphael L. Podolsky

Recommended GAE Committee action: JOINT FAVORABLE
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This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Advisory Council to the Superior Court Housing Session (formerly known as the Citizens Advisory Council for Housing Matters), of which I am chairperson. The Council is a state advisory board on the housing court system. It was established initially in 1978, when the first housing court was created by the legislature, and is codified at C.G.S. 47a-71a. It has prepared biennial reports every two years since it was created. This bill would modify changes made by the legislature last year in P.A. 13-299, an omnibus bill on government agencies. In particular, it would substantially restore the Council's old name and would adjust its size.

(1) Name of the Advisory Council: The bill would substantially restore the Advisory Council's former name (it would have the same acronym). Normally, no one would care; but the name change unintentionally implied a significantly reduced function for the Advisory Council. The Advisory Council is an advisory board "on housing matters" and advises and works with many entities other than "the Superior Court housing session." For example, in addition to its work with the Judicial Branch (which is not limited to housing sessions), it regularly and routinely makes recommendations to the Chief State's Attorney (who supervises housing prosecutors) and has worked closely with his office on the production of two booklets on the criminal prosecution of housing cases. Similarly, the Advisory Council has at various times made recommendations concerning housing matters to other Executive Branch agencies (e.g., the Department of Social Services and the Department of Administrative Services), to the Governor, and to the General Assembly. The former name correctly indicated the breadth of the Advisory Council's role. Although last year's bill did not change the Council's statutory functions, the Council is concerned that the new name will in the long run unintentionally narrow its role.

(2) Size of the Advisory Council: The membership of the Council is broken into four segments. Prior to 2013, its membership consisted of nine persons from each segment -- each of the three housing court districts (Hartford-New Britain, New Haven-Waterbury, and Bridgeport-Norwalk) and the balance of the state. P.A. 13-299 reduced the size of the Council to three members from each of the four segments. The Council

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agrees that a 36-member council was much too large, but the reduction in 2013 by two-thirds makes the Council too small, particularly for its work in the three housing court districts, for which it often breaks into subcommittees to address area-specific matters. A three-person subcommittee is not sufficiently large. The bill would add two members to each of the three segments of the Council involving housing court districts. This would still be a 50% reduction from its previous size but would give the Council enough members from the three housing court districts to function effectively in a subcommittee structure.